

## Revision Task 2: Literature Paper I Section A: *Romeo and Juliet*

### Understanding exams

When examiners come to mark an exam they are given something by the exam board called INDICATIVE CONTENT. Indicative content is like a crib sheet of ideas that a candidate *could* talk about. An example is given below. You have the extract and exam question and then the indicative content.

Below it there is another extract and exam question. Write the indicative content for this exam question in the style of the example given.

## Example Essay Question:

Read this extract from Act I Scene 4 and then answer the question. In this extract, Mercutio, Benvolio and Romeo talk about dreams and fate before going to the Capulets' party.

### MERCUTIO

True, I talk of dreams,  
Which are the children of an idle brain,  
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy,  
Which is as thin of substance as the air  
And more inconstant than the wind, who woos  
Even now the frozen bosom of the north,  
And, being anger'd, puffs away from thence,  
Turning his face to the dew-dropping south.

### BENVOLIO

This wind, you talk of, blows us from ourselves;  
Supper is done, and we shall come too late.

### ROMEO

I fear, too early: for my mind misgives  
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars  
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date  
With this night's revels and expire the term  
Of a despised life closed in my breast  
By some vile forfeit of untimely death.  
But He, that hath the steerage of my course,  
Direct my sail! On, lusty gentlemen.

Starting with this speech, explore how Shakespeare presents fate in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents fate in this speech.
- how Shakespeare presents fate in the play as a whole

[30 marks]

## Example Indicative Content:

### AO1: Key ideas

Fate is an incredibly important and prominent theme in *Romeo and Juliet*. In this scene Mercutio talks about dreams after his infamous 'Queen Mab' speech. Dreams, Mercutio tells us, are made of nothing: "Begot of nothing but vain fantasy". They are the workings of a mind asleep or "an idle brain". But dreams were important in the Elizabethan period – people linked dreams with belief in the supernatural and also ideas around fate – that our futures and destinies have already been decided by the 'stars' or other supernatural beings. Mercutio plays on English folklore about fairies and Queen Mab to suggest dreams cause nothing but mischief.

However, Romeo tells Mercutio he feels something dark and sinister will happen to them because it is what fate has in store for them: "I fear, too early: for my mind misgives / Some consequence yet hanging in the stars" Romeo's dreams are more important to him and suggest he has a pre-ordained or pre-decided fate. Given as an audience we know Romeo and Juliet will die having been told this in the Prologue at the start of the play, these allusions to fate remind us that this play is a tragedy and some tragic events await as we continue to watch. As an audience then, we want to know what will happen at the Capulets' party.

Mercutio seems at odds with Romeo over the importance of dreams. Mercutio claims dreams are nothing but fantasy and that we dream of the things most important to us, as if they are just echoes of our own lives ("dreamers often lie", but Romeo gives them a weight and importance ("In bed asleep, while they do dream things true."))

Students could also talk about how Romeo refers to himself as fortune's fool in Act 3 Scene 1 having killed Tybalt in a fit of rage over Mercutio's death. He again seems to refuse responsibility for his own actions, claiming he is a victim of fortune and has acted out what fate has pre-ordained or decided for him. Students could discuss the Prologue at the start of the play and how it addresses Romeo and Juliet as 'star-cross'd lovers'.

Every major event seems to occur 'too early' in the play, as if out of joint or out of line with what is supposed to happen. Tybalt attacks Romeo before Romeo's marriage to Juliet can be made public, Juliet's parents try to make her marry Paris before her marriage to Romeo can be revealed, and Romeo discovers Juliet's body before she wakes up. Everything that is not supposed to go wrong does and hence why this is a tragedy not a comedy.

### AO2: Analysis of language, structure and form

Romeo seems to reject the idea that he is in control of his own fate, declaring: "By some vile forfeit of untimely death. / But He, that hath the steerage of my course, / Direct my sail!" He uses the pronoun 'He' to allude to fate and nautical metaphors of "steerage", "course" and "sail" to suggest Romeo is on a journey of fate that is beyond his free will. The adjective 'untimely' accentuates the suggestion that someone will die before their 'time' is due or too soon, which links back to the Prologue at the beginning of the play where "star-cross'd lovers" take their own lives.

Romeo uses personification to describe a consequence "yet hanging in the stars" which adds to a sense that destiny is being controlled by unseen, supernatural beings.

"By some vile forfeit of untimely death" uses the adjectives 'vile' and 'untimely' to suggest things are not as they should be, as if awful events will happen in the future even though they're not supposed to.

### AO3: Linking to social and historical contexts

Elizabethan attitudes regarding fate, free will and the supernatural.

English folklore in relation to Queen Mab and Mercutio's speech about the nature of dreams and dreaming  
Significance of prologues and how they build foreshadowing and foreboding in a tragedy

## Revision Task Example Essay Question:

Read this extract from Act 2 Scene 2 and then answer the question. At this point in the play, Juliet and Romeo discuss their fledging relationship.

ROMEO

If my heart's dear love—

JULIET

Well, do not swear: although I joy in thee,  
I have no joy of this contract to-night:  
It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;  
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be  
Ere one can say 'It lightens.' Sweet, good night!  
This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,  
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet.  
Good night, good night! as sweet repose and rest  
Come to thy heart as that within my breast!

ROMEO

O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?

JULIET

What satisfaction canst thou have to-night?

ROMEO

The exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine.

Starting with this speech, explore how Shakespeare presents youth in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents youth in this speech.
- how Shakespeare presents youth in the play as a whole.

[30 marks]

## Revision Task Indicative Content: